

CUNNINGHAM Michael

Name: Michael Cunningham

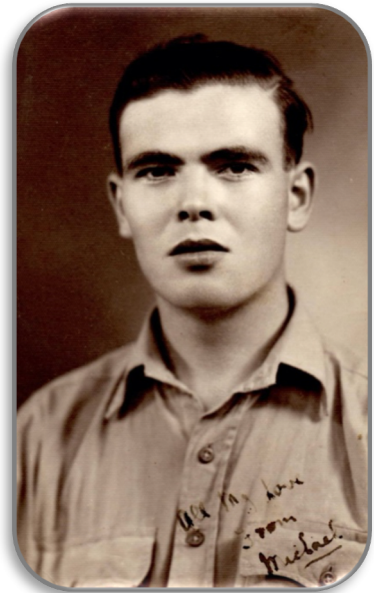
Born: 1920

Rank: AC1

Service Number: 1221037

Regiment/Unit: 153 Maintenance
Unit, RAF

Died: 21 April 1973



Pre-War:

Michael was born on the 19th July 1920 in Hamilton, Scotland. He was the sixth child of ten born to Michael Snr and Rachel, Nee SMITH. He was no doubt made a big fuss of by his two older brothers and his three sisters. Four more siblings followed but their lives were to take a turn for the worse with the closure of the Glasgow mines where Michael Senior worked. The family packed up and left Scotland on 3 November 1934 and moved to England.

Wartime experience:

Michael joined the RAF on 25 Nov 1940. He was 20 years old. He had wanted to be a pilot but tested colour blind so instead he served with the 153 Maintenance Unit and was soon posted to the Far East. He travelled via Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. When the Japanese made their way down the Malayan peninsular, and it looked like Singapore would be taken, several RAF personnel were evacuated to Java which, at the time, was controlled by the Dutch, and the Dutch East India Company. Singapore fell to the Japanese and, soon after, the Dutch capitulated. On 5th March 1942 Michael began his life as a prisoner of war of the Japanese.



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He was initially moved around camps on Java, but in August 1943, he was shipped back to Singapore and briefly held at Changi. From Singapore he was transported to Japan on one of the 'Hell Ships'. In November 1943, he arrived in Osaka where he was forced to work down the Mitsubishi Mining Company's copper mine.

Family folklore has it that, as there had been no word of his survival, it was presumed by everyone that he had died. However, his mother, Rachel refused to believe this, by saying that she knew he was still alive, a belief that she held on to throughout his incarceration. Her mother's intuition also told her the moment her younger son, Robert, was killed in France, on 25 June 1944.

Civilian life after return:

It is well documented that reintroduction to life back at home was very difficult for these returning POWs, but by 1949 Michael was getting married and starting a family. Michael and Marie Distin had 4 children before their marriage came to an abrupt end in 1960. Michael never remarried and died following a heart attack on 21 April 1973 aged 52.



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